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ABSTRACT

Research shows that preschool produces the strongest effects when teachers are well qualified. Noting that most Head Start preschool teachers do not hold even the minimum teaching degrees required to teach kindergarten, this policy brief looks at the costs of putting highly qualified teachers in Head Start classrooms to improve the effectiveness of the program. The brief notes the salary/wage differential between Head Start teachers and public school kindergarten teachers, and highlights issues in raising Head Start teacher qualifications, including gradual salary increases, and assistance for Head Start teachers wishing to attend college. The brief projects that the cost to put a well-qualified teacher in every Head Start classroom, phased in over an 8-year period, would range from $177 million in the first year to $1.4 billion in year eight, representing less than 1/1000th of the federal budget. (HTH)

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Preschool Policy Matters

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Issue 4 / August 2003

Head Start Investment

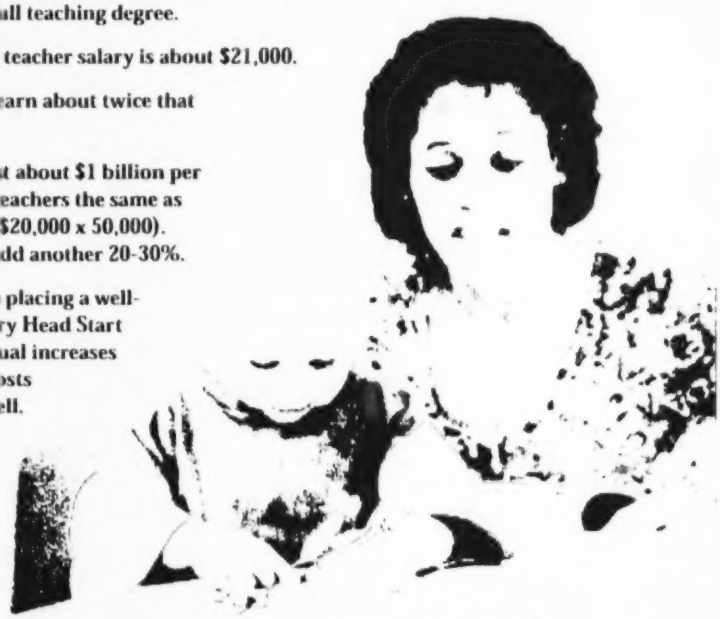
Investing in Head Start Teachers

Efforts to improve the effectiveness of Head Start must begin with teachers. Research shows that preschool produces the strongest effects when teachers are well qualified. Preschool teachers with a BA degree in early childhood education are the most effective, yet most Head Start preschool teachers don't hold even the minimum teaching degrees required to teach kindergarten. Moreover, Head Start teachers are paid less than half the salary of a kindergarten teacher, making it impossible for Head Start to hire and retain equally qualified teachers.

The cost to put a well-qualified teacher in every Head Start classroom, phased-in over an eight-year period, would range from $177 million in the first year to $1.4 billion in year eight, or less than a rounding error in the projected federal budget. By the time the figures reach their highest level in the eighth year, the cost represents less than 1/1000th of the federal budget.

What We Know

- **Better-educated preschool teachers with specialized training are most effective.**
- **Head Start employs about 50,000 teachers, but more than 70 percent lack a full teaching degree.**
- **The average Head Start teacher salary is about $21,000.**
- **Public school teachers earn about twice that much, $43,000.**
- **Ultimately, it would cost about $1 billion per year to pay Head Start teachers the same as kindergarten teachers ($20,000 x 50,000). Fringe benefits would add another 20-30%.**
- **Practical approaches to placing a well-qualified teacher in every Head Start classroom require gradual increases over time. As a result, costs increase gradually as well.**



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR EARLY EDUCATION RESEARCH

Contact Us:
120 Albany Street, Suite 500
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Tel (732) 932-4350
Fax (732) 932-4360
Website: nieer.org
E-mail: info@nieer.org

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Better-educated teachers have more positive, sensitive and responsive interactions with children, provide richer language and cognitive experiences, and are less authoritarian, punitive and detached.

Details

Teacher qualifications

Research shows that preschool produces the strongest effects when teachers are well qualified. Preschool teachers with B.A. degrees in early childhood education are the most effective.

However, most preschool teachers are less qualified in Head Start.

Head Start has made efforts to improve teacher qualifications by requiring 50% of teachers to have A.A. degrees by 2003. Estimates based on the 2001-02 Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) indicate about 30% of Head Start teachers currently possess (at least) a bachelor's degree.

However, Head Start teacher qualifications vary greatly across states: in New York, 64% have a B.A. or higher; in Alaska and Alabama, only 12% have a B.A.

Teacher qualifications can be increased through turnover and higher standards for new hires and by assisting current staff in attaining BA degrees in early childhood.

Teacher compensation

Teacher compensation affects program quality by allowing preschools to hire and retain teachers with better qualifications and other characteristics that make them more effective.

Head Start teachers earn an average annual salary of $21,287. Kindergarten teachers earn an average of $43,152 (median from salary.com for 2002-03). Head Start assistant teachers earn an average of $14,162.

PIR data from 2001-02 list the following teacher salaries by educational level:

- $19,004 for Head Start teachers with CDA credentials,
- $21,049 for those with an A.A.,
- $25,090 for those with a B.A., and
- $31,061 for teachers with a graduate-level degree.

The highest average salaries ($30,420 across all degree types) are paid in Hawaii, while the lowest ($16,106) are paid in Montana.

Table 1. **Head Start Teacher Qualifications in 2001-02 (National Avg.)**

BA or Higher Degree	29%
AA Degree	23%
CDA or State Credential	35%
No Degree or CDA	13%

Source: Head Start Program Information Report, 2001-02 Program Year

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Issues in Raising Head Start Teacher Qualifications

If highly qualified teachers are to be recruited and retained by Head Start, both teacher qualifications and compensation will have to be increased. Teacher salaries and fringe benefits will need to increase along with standards for Head Start teachers.

We estimate that increased fringe benefits would add 20-30% to the salary cost of raising Head Start teacher quality.

There are a number of practical issues that must be taken into account by any policy that seeks to increase Head Start teacher qualifications and compensation. These include:

- The process will take time. Head Start can use higher salaries to recruit and retain better teachers and to persuade current teachers to increase their qualifications. In so doing, Head Start needs to ensure that it is obtaining the best teachers it can for the money by improving the qualifications of existing teachers and recruiting new teachers.
- Teacher turnover is sufficiently high that a substantial part of the upgrade in teacher quality can be accomplished by hiring new teachers with higher qualifications at better salaries to replace those who leave. Head Start teacher turnover exceeds 15% annually.
- As many teachers will be either new hires or experienced teachers with newly acquired BA degrees, their initial compensation will be lower than that of the average K-12 teacher even if they are on a comparable pay scale. Thus, the initial average salary of many teachers would be more comparable to entry level K-12 salaries (about $30,000) than average K-12 salaries (about $44,000).
- The cost of raising teacher qualifications and compensation can be calculated in constant dollars (without inflation) or nominal dollars (adding in expected inflation for future years).
- Cost will also depend on whether the number of children served increases, decreases, or stays about the same.
- Gradual increases in salary are preferable to an immediate increase to the average for K-12 teachers. The goal of salary increases is to attract better teachers and prevent the best teachers from leaving. Programs may not want to permanently retain all of the current teachers with BAs at higher salaries. Also, an immediate doubling of pay for 30% of the teachers while the rest receive no increase could create serious morale problems. Local administrative flexibility in gradually increasing compensation is more likely to achieve the goal.
- Assisting Head Start teachers without BAs to attend college would add to the cost of raising teacher qualifications. However such a policy would capitalize on the strengths of the existing teaching force. Its cost would depend on how many Head Start teachers choose to pursue a BA, their current levels of education, college completion rates, and whether the program pays for tuition only or reimburses students for such other costs as fees, books, and transportation. A very modest tuition reimbursement program for teachers who already have AAs could cost less than $100 million over 5 years. A very broad program enrolling all teachers without a BA could cost more than $500 million over 5 years.

Cost of Placing a Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Head Start Classroom

Many practical judgments must be made in designing a plan requiring BA level teachers in Head Start: how fast to proceed, how much to rely on existing teachers, how and when new pay scales will be implemented. Recognizing that plans can vary, we estimate the cost of one approach that requires all Head Start teachers have a BA within 8 years. The estimate uses data from the 2001-02 Program Information Report (PIR), together with the following assumptions:

- The total number of classroom teachers required is 50,000 (from the PIR we estimate 47,238 classroom teachers in 2001-02).
- The percentage of teachers with a BA or higher degree is 29%; with an AA degree - 23%, a Child Development Associates (CDA) or State Credential - 35%, and those with no degree or CDA is 13%.
- Head Start adds 5% new teachers with a BA each year through turnover in less qualified teachers.
- After 4 years, 25% of Head Start teachers with AA's acquire BA's in each of the next 4 years.
- After 6 years, 1500 Head Start teachers with less than an AA degree acquire a BA in the next two years.
- The average salary for a teacher with a BA rises to $30,000 in year 1 and rises by $2000 each year for the next 7 years.
- The average salary for a teacher with a graduate degree rises to $36,000 in year 1 and rises by $2,000 each year for the next 7 years.
- Fringe benefits add 25% to the cost of total compensation.
- Inflation adds 2% per year to nominal cost
- These estimates do not include costs of a program to assist Head Start teachers obtain BA degrees.

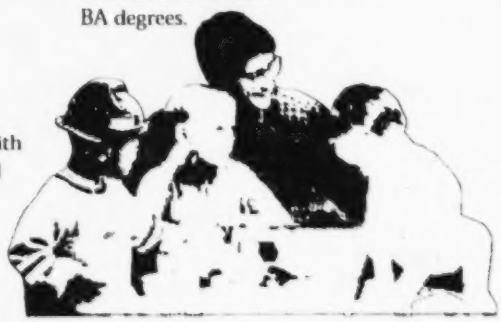

Table 2. **Estimated Compensation Costs of BA Requirement for All Head Start over 8 Years**

	Annual Cost of Teachers Salary	Annual Cost of Teachers Salary and Fringe Benefits	Cumulative Cost of Teachers Salary and Fringe Benefits
Year 1	$140,958,683	$176,198,354	$176,198,354
Year 2	$184,968,633	$231,210,791	$407,409,144
Year 3	$240,993,907	$301,242,383	$708,651,528
Year 4	$356,730,305	$445,912,882	$1,154,564,410
Year 5	$500,255,069	$625,318,836	$1,779,883,245
Year 6	$672,879,076	$841,098,846	$2,620,982,091
Year 7	$907,127,752	$1,133,909,690	$3,754,891,781
Year 8	$1,121,082,141	$1,401,352,676	$5,156,244,457

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